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Gerald of Wales

A New Approach

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Abstract

The History and Topography of Ireland, written by Gerald of Wales, offers a vivid insight into the significance and purpose of literature in twelfth-century Norman England. This dissertation seeks to place Gerald's works within the 'bigger picture' of the twelfth century. While numerous historians have made reference to Gerald of Wales in relation to specific topics, few set his works in a broader political, cultural or literary scope. This study considers Gerald's motives for writing the *Topography*, within the context of these broader themes. His potential motives are compared with those of his contemporaries, to determine whether his views were unique or more prevalent among writers of his time. This is done by assessing Gerald's *Topography* alongside similar works by both contemporary and classical writers. The present study draws on previous historiographical trends in considering the influence of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance on Gerald's works. It also employs more recent trends in assessing Gerald's writings from the perspective of cultural and intellectual history. The study diverges from traditional approaches, however, in its attempt to draw together each of these historiographical trends. Gerald's work is thus contextualized within a broader historical landscape. This approach offers new insights into political, intellectual and literary influences on twelfth-century writing. The findings of this dissertation determine Gerald's main inspirations in writing. These include his political motives, education, and classical literary influences. New links between medieval and classical texts are also considered. These conclusions offer a fresh contribution to traditional scholarship and existing studies of the *Topography.* A broader approach is taken in examining the content and purpose of such works, as well as their place within wider medieval society.

Contents

Introduction

What can a case-study of twelfth-century Norman literature reveal about wider political, intellectual and literary trends of the time? How does *The History and Topography of Ireland* by Gerald of Wales illustrate these trends?

> What new things, and what secret things not in accordance with her usual course had nature hidden away in the farthest western lands? For beyond those limits there is no land…beyond the whole horizon only the ocean flows and is borne on in boundless space through its unsearchable and hidden ways.[1]

With these words Gerald of Wales introduced his *History and Topography of Ireland*. Medieval notions of strange, faraway lands and peoples remain significant to today's historians, especially with regard to twelfth-century writing. The time is of particular historical interest for its distinctive revival of classical learning and thought. Gerald of Wales' text offers much insight into the influence of this revival on medieval society. His descriptions have been employed frequently in existing historiographical strands, usually with reference to twelfth-century literature, politics and thought. In this dissertation, an attempt is made to link each of these strands together. The paper addresses what such a source as Gerald's can reveal about the broader political, intellectual and literary environment in which it was written. Gerald was a churchman of Welsh-Norman descent, employed in the court of King Henry II of England (1154-1189). *The History and Topography of Ireland* was written by Gerald in about 1185, following his travels through Ireland. His motives for writing the *Topography* will be discussed within a wider twelfth-century context.

Gerald wrote very disparagingly of the Irish. He portrayed the island itself in a positive light, but suggested it completely wasted on its barbarous inhabitants. This view gives rise to many interesting questions, which are dealt with throughout this paper. First, the motives for Gerald to write in this manner will be considered. He worked in the court of a Norman king, at a time when Norman influence and intervention was spreading rapidly. His motives may thus have been largely political. Influences on his ideas and written style will also be examined.

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[1] Gerald of Wales, preface to *The History and Topography of Ireland,* trans. by John O'Meara (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 31.

These include intellectual and literary influences, both contemporary and ancient.

Historiography

Several strands of historiographical debate are relevant to this study. The main trend expressly concerns Gerald and the contextualization of his works by previous generations of historians. Cultural and social approaches to Gerald's works are found in the writings of several recent historians.[2] These authors examine medieval perceptions of 'the other', as expressed through such works as Gerald's. Notions of marginalism, and the sub-humanity of peoples from other lands and cultures, are especially relevant in this strand. Although not a 'historian' himself, Gerald's historical material on Ireland is of importance for both social and cultural historians.[3] Another strand of existing debate about Gerald of Wales has been employed by James Cain and David Rollo. They explore Gerald's use of classical texts and anecdotes, and what these suggest about his own educational background and literary aims.[4] These strands will be followed in the present study. Changes and trends in medieval culture, education, and literature will also be examined. These will be viewed within a broader context of twelfth-century belief and learning, however, than has been done in some previous studies.

Another related line of historiographical debate concerns the wider Twelfth-Century Renaissance, and its intellectual context. The concept of a 'Renaissance' of classical learning during the twelfth-century was first proposed by Charles Homer Haskins.[5] He focused particularly on the revival of classical Latin culture, rhetoric and literature during the age.[6] This concept has been the subject of considerable debate and development over the last century. Some historians, such as art historian Erwin Panofsky, have claimed Haskins' idea

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[2] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales', in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages,* ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 85-104; Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000-1534* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp.46-70; Andrew Hadfield, 'Rethinking Early-Modern Colonialism: The Anomalous State of Ireland', *Irish Studies Review,* 7.1 (1999), 13-26; James. D. Cain, 'Unnatural History: Gender and Genealogy in Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica', Essays in Medieval Studies,* 19 (2002), 29-43.

[3] Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c.550-c.1307* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 245.

[4] Cain, 'Unnatural History', 33-38; David Rollo, *Glamourous Sorcery: Magic and Literacy in the High Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 123-133.

[5] Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 3-31.

[6] Christopher Brooke, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), p. 15.

essentially wrong.[7] Panofsky argued that there was not one Twelfth-Century Renaissance, but various intellectual and cultural movements at different times and places throughout the century. Historians Christopher Brooke and Warren C. Hollister both argued in favour of expanding Haskins' definition.[8] Hollister considered the definition of such terms as 'renaissance', its meaning, and connotations. He also discussed the rejection of the term by several medievalists, who found that such conventional labels placed a too restrictive definition on different historical eras.[9] Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable have contributed to the expansion of the term in modern debate.[10] Recent historians accept the original thesis by Haskins, a trend which is followed here. They also attempt to broaden the definitions of 'renaissance'. They explore the influence of revived classical learning and culture in wider twelfth-century society, as well as in literary works.[11] In recent years historians have further developed Haskins' theory, examining the lives and works of various twelfth-century writers in the context of the classical revival.[12]

A third and more recent strand in historiography is that of examining chronicle literature itself, and placing more emphasis on *how* texts were written. This thread is significant as it signals a shift away from previous 'Von Rankean' approaches to such texts as Gerald's, which mainly sought to define its 'facts'. A more relativist approach is taken by recent historians such as Matthew Kempshall.[13] Kempshall examines the purpose for which medieval chronicles and narrative works were written. In particular, he focuses on the audiences for whom medieval texts were shaped. Kempshall provides significant material for this new trend. He discusses audience reception, and the efforts of medieval chroniclers to suit their readers' expectations.[14] Writers aimed to provide their audiences with a lively and polished narrative, as well as with pure instruction or 'fact'. This approach stresses the significance of interpreting written sources from different angles. Consideration should be

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[7] Erwin Panofsky, 'Dissent and Qualification: Erwin Panofsky, from *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*', in *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance,* ed. by C. Warren Hollister (New York, NY: Wiley, 1969), pp. 19-34.
[8] C. Warren Hollister, Introduction to Ibid., pp. 1-5; Brooke, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance,* esp. pp. 9-18.
[9] Hollister, Ibid., p. 2.
[10] Giles Constable, 'Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities', in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 37-67.
[11] Janet Martin, 'Classicism and Style in Latin Literature', in Ibid., pp. 537-568.
[12] R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), pp. 61-85; R.W. Southern, 'The Schools of Paris and the School of Chartres', in Ibid., pp. 113-137.
[13] Matthew Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), esp. c. 3, pp. 265-349.
[14] Ibid., p. 311.

given not only to the material which the text presents, but also to the purpose for which it was written.[15] This thread is especially relevant in examining the relationship between Gerald and Henry II. Rather than treating Gerald's works as mere statements of fact or belief, as has often been done in the past, the new thread considers, for example, the extent to which Gerald wrote in the interests of the King. The place of Gerald's works in cultural history, and the influence of the intellectual Twelfth-Century Renaissance on such writers as Gerald, are two key historiographical themes in this paper.

Methodology

The *Topography* is used in this dissertation for its very useful and interesting points of comparison with Gerald's contemporaries, and with classical writers. This, in turn, reveals more about broader twelfth-century trends in written literature. Such ideas have been considered separately, and in numerous ways, in the above historiographical strands. There are less studies, though, which link each strand to create a 'bigger picture'. This dissertation, therefore, attempts to offer a new approach. Gerald's works will be contextualized not only within isolated cultural and intellectual trends directly linked to his life. This paper aims to link aspects of political, cultural, and literary context to the wider twelfth-century world. The methodology employed here sets aside the Von Rankean approach with which the *Topography* has been traditionally studied. Instead, it will draw substantially on recent historiographical trends advanced by Kempshall. As such, Gerald's work will be examined not only in terms of its 'factual' content. A critical approach will be taken, in order to examine the underlying purpose of Gerald's writing in the context of his wider society. This approach involves interpreting Gerald's motives from the perspective of cultural and intellectual history.

Each chapter will include a thematic case-study of aspects from the *Topography*. These themes will both determine and illustrate the wider context behind Gerald's work. The first chapter will deal with Gerald's ideas of Irish religion. Examples of Irish culture, employed in the second chapter, are useful in drawing comparisons with wider Norman culture, in order to determine whether the two were indeed as different as suggested by Gerald. The theme of Irish wildlife will be employed as a case-study in the third chapter. This theme is significant because it includes many examples of animal allegories, bestiaries, and anecdotes borrowed directly by Gerald from authors of antiquity. These examples show-case Gerald's literary

[15] Hadfield, 'Rethinking Early-Modern Colonialism', 14.

style. They also show a more widespread desire of medieval authors to present in their writings literary flourish and skill, as well as a mere relaying of 'truth'. The case-studies also establish the extent to which Gerald conformed to or diverged from existing trends in thought, belief, and literary style in the wider Norman world. Examples also supply evidence as to his motives for writing. When Gerald's work is viewed within the broader context of twelfth-century Norman England and compared to other sources, both contemporary and classical, interesting revelations come to light regarding his originality or adherence to existing literary trends.

Chapter Structure

The first chapter will explore political context. Primarily this concerns the court of Henry II for whom Gerald wrote, and his potential motives regarding both political and personal propaganda. The example of Gerald's treatment of religion is most useful to employ here. His 'propaganda' for Norman intervention in Ireland, namely to bring Christianity to a Godless race, gives a strong insight into his political motives. His passionate claims of Irish barbarity, irreligion and sin appear a justification, and illustration of the necessity for Norman intervention. This, and his personal desire for promotion at court, hint at his motives for writing the *Topography*. He likely aimed to glorify and flatter Henry II's kingdom, by drawing a comparison with the savage Irish people.

The second chapter involves an examination of the cultural and intellectual context of twelfth-century England. It will focus mainly on contemporary influences on Gerald, and will address generally prevalent views of his Norman contemporaries towards cultural 'difference'. It will also address earlier views of such writers as Bede.[16] Building on the first chapter's theme of Irish religion as expressed in the *Topography*, this chapter draws on examples of Irish culture as perceived by Gerald. In doing so, historiographical questions concerning his motives and inspirations for writing are further developed.

The third chapter presents an in-depth consideration of medieval literary style and its classical sources. The aforementioned contexts of political propaganda and intellectual background are drawn together in this chapter. It examines the extent to which authors of the time in fact borrowed from writers and rhetoricists of antiquity. A particularly significant theme from Gerald's own writings, used as case-study for this chapter, is his use of natural

[16] Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. by Leo Sherley-Price (Middlesex: Penguin, 1955), esp. Book 1, pp. 37-92.

allegories and tales in describing the wildlife and people of Ireland. His use of allegory is especially striking, as it shows the extent to which both he and his contemporaries borrowed from writers of antiquity. The three themes of political, intellectual and literary context, accompanied by their corresponding examples of Irish religion, Irish culture, and Irish nature as portrayed by Gerald, are compared with the works of writers before, alongside and after him. Accordingly, the extent to which his views particularly reflected or digressed from those of others will be established. Finally, this study asks whether Gerald can be seen as a potentially representative voice for more widely-held beliefs of his era.

Chapter I ~ Motivations

Throughout the *Topography*, Gerald outlined in detail the vices and flaws of Irish people. His colourful descriptions of Irish savagery and irreligion suggest some underlying purpose or message which he sought to convey, beyond expressing a mere view. A political motive seems the most likely explanation. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, Gerald likely wrote in hope of gaining personal promotion in Henry's court. By providing a comparative piece of literature, exalting the glories of his own kingdom, he emphasized the irreligion of the barbaric islanders across the sea. By casting the Irish in an overly negative light, the invading Norman realm, by comparison, would appear much more civilized and pious. Secondly, and related to this aim, Gerald offered a political justification for the invasion of Ireland. At the time, Norman injustices in the conquest of Ireland were coming to light. Thus Gerald sought to illustrate all that was wrong with Ireland. These wrongs required urgent fixing by Norman colonizers. Evidence of this motive is found in Gerald's stance on Irish religion. To determine whether his views of 'others' were representative of those throughout medieval Norman society, sources of Gerald's contemporaries will be examined.

Gerald of Wales highlighted Irish barbarity and hopelessness in all aspects of their personal, social and biological lives. Likewise, he found them hopeless with regard to any sense of spiritual devotion. One account in the *Topography*, retold to Gerald by presumably Norman sailors, nicely illustrates Gerald's view of Irish religion. The sailors told of being caught in a storm at sea, after which they came upon a small boat. In it sat two naked men, who spoke Irish. The extent of Irish Christian knowledge, according to Gerald, was made clear by these men: 'When asked if they were Christians and baptized, they replied that they had as yet heard nothing of Christ and knew nothing about him'.[1]

The questionable accuracy of such claims, even in reading other parts of the *Topography*, is immediately apparent. Having established that Irish-folk in general, represented by these two naked savages at sea, had no clue of religion whatsoever, Gerald went on to describe the beautiful churches he encountered in his travels. One church in Ulster, situated on an island

[1] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland,* pt. 3, p.111.

in a lake, was noted for its frequent visitations by angels and the visible presence of saints.[2] He also wrote of a province once submerged by a huge flood, after which boats sailing across it could still see the towers of churches.[3] The presence of churches suggests that the Irish *did* in fact have some form of organized faith, long before Norman intervention. Irish Christianity can be traced as far back as the fifth century to the first formal mission to Ireland, while the first Irish churches emerged in the seventh century.[4] The arrival of Patrick in Ireland circa AD 530, also mentioned by Gerald, signified the beginnings of Irish conversion to Christianity and the introduction of monasticism to the country.[5]

Further evidence of Christianity in Ireland was in Gerald's account of a book he saw there during his travels. This book he described as wonderful, marvellously colourful, and intricately decorated.[6] This was most likely the famous *Book of Kells*, produced by Irish scribes between the seventh and ninth centuries.[7] Gerald claimed the book to be 'miraculously written'; its beauty seemed the work of angels rather than men.[8] He was no doubt familiar, though, with illuminated manuscripts from his own country. Thus what the book must have shown Gerald was a striking statement on the rise of Irish religion, and depth of Christian faith, long before any Norman ever set foot on Irish shores. Intricate illustrations of the gospels and saints, laden throughout with religious imagery and symbolism, show a deep understanding of themes in Christianity. They also serve as an outstanding testament to the importance of religious faith in early Christian Ireland.[9] The book quite literally illustrated the power of religion in Irish society, and the expression of God's word through such documents. A vast amount of time and effort was no doubt devoted to producing such manuscripts, made to serve as a tangible glorification of Christ and the Christian faith. Thus, the notion that Irish-folk had no knowledge of Christianity before Norman intervention, as implied by Gerald, is laughable.

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[2] Ibid., pt. 2, p. 61.

[3] Ibid., pt. 2, p. 65.

[4] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* (New York: Longman, 1995), p. 147.

[5] Tomás Cardinal Ó Fiaich, 'The Beginnings of Christianity', in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. by T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin (Dublin: Mercier, 1994), pp. 64-65.

[6] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland,* pt. 2, p. 84.

[7] Carol Farr, *The Book of Kells: Its Function and Audience* (London: British Library, 1997), p. 13.

[8] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland,* pt. 2, p. 84.

[9] Bernard Meehan, *Book of Kells*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012), p. 13.

It should be noted that there are some uncertainties in current scholarship about whether the book that Gerald referred to was indeed the *Book of Kells*, or one similar to it.[10] Even if he saw a different book though, his reference is nevertheless significant. It suggests that similar sources to that of the *Book of Kells* were in existence in Ireland at the time. This would in fact make an even stronger statement about early Irish faith. Such books were quite possibly not a one-off effort, but various manuscripts of this kind might have been produced at different times and places. The biblical themes displayed in the *Book of Kells* were thus not limited to one place; they were possibly widespread throughout early Irish society.

Gerald made numerous claims of religious ignorance. Meanwhile, solid proof of Irish Christianity and monasticism surrounded him in his travels. His reasons for making such claims are of significance with regard to his motives for writing the *Topography*. Gerald cannot have taken his own claims seriously. He gave his readers ample evidence of religious development in Ireland. His generous dishing out of hyperbole to describe the savage, pagan ways of the Irish clearly served a purpose, therefore, besides simply voicing a personal view. Gerald's deliberate misrepresentation of Irish people and their irreligious nature likely served several political functions. Primarily, it offered a distorted image of Irish-folk to Henry II and the Anglo-Norman court. In doing so, Gerald justified the invasion of Ireland.[11]

This justification was important, as it came at a time when the controversial document of *Laudabiliter* was being questioned. In this papal bull, Pope Adrian IV (1154-1159) supposedly granted Henry II *dominium* over Ireland.[12] The letter made its first public appearance in Gerald's own work, the *Expugnatio Hibernica*. There it was included in an account of Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) confirming Henry II's lordship over Ireland in 1172.[13] Gerald's writings on religion are particularly significant here, as this was one aspect of Irish culture which *Laudabiliter* was especially designed to reform. The document's terms 'obliged Henry to protect and extend the church and to give the Irish a stiff dose of twelfth-

[10] Ibid., p. 16.
[11] Rollo, *Glamourous Sorcery*, p. 132; Henrietta Leyser and Melvyn Bragg speaking as part of the programme 'Gerald of Wales' *In Our Time* (BBC Radio 4), http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01n1rbn

[12] Anne J. Duggan, 'The Power of Documents: The Curious Case of *Laudabiliter',* in *Aspects of Power and Authority in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Brenda Bolton and Christine Meek (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 255.
[13] Ibid., p. 257.

century law and morals'.[14]

Gerald explained that the Irish were ignorant of the rudiments of faith, and needed instruction, reform, and discipline by the English church. Hence, the Pope had reputedly given Henry a privilege, through *Laudabiliter,* to rule over Ireland.[15] The document itself has been subject to debate amongst some historians, however. Gerald's account of papal confirmation of the original privilege, granted by Pope Adrian IV, has been questioned. Several inaccuracies were evident in Gerald's account. Firstly, its claims were contradicted by three genuine papal bulls of 1172, relating to Irish affairs. Secondly, the style and manner of address in the letter presented by Gerald did not conform to papal conventions.[16] These discrepancies have led some historians to suggest that the supposed letter of Alexander's approval, as conveyed by Gerald, was a complete fabrication.[17]

The main reason that Gerald would have been inclined to forge such a document was very likely to do with providing justification for Norman intervention in Ireland. Hoping to cast himself in a positive light before the King, Gerald wrote emphatically of the need for foreign intervention. He suggested an *extreme* lack of social, legal or religious organization, which needed urgent attending to by outsiders. Thereby he could justify, on behalf of his King, the Norman presence. This motive was of particular significance at a time when the legitimacy of the Norman invasion of Ireland, under Henry II's reign, was coming under scrutiny.[18]

Both Irish and Anglo-Irish critics of English policy argued that the English had not kept their obligations under the existing grant.[19] This view was rebuffed in later writings of Gerald's, namely in the *Expugnatio Hibernica*. Here he stated explicitly: 'in entering Ireland, the English were not guilty of injustice such as is foolishly attributed to them by the ill-informed'.[20] Gerald likely felt obliged to refute personally these claims on the King's

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[14] Robin Frame, *Ireland and Britain 1170-1450* (London: Hambledon, 1998), p. 27.

[15] Duggan, 'The Power of Documents', p. 257.

[16] Ibid., p. 258.

[17] Ibid., p. 258.

[18] Sean Duffy, 'Henry II and England's Insular Neighbours', in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, ed. by Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), p. 139.

[19] Duggan, 'The Power of Documents', p. 256.

[20] Gerald of Wales, quoted in Duffy, 'Henry II and England's Insular Neighbours', p. 139.

behalf.[21] In doing so, he probably hoped to make a good impression on Henry by defending the King's policies and the actions of his realm. Since Gerald wrote at a time when the injustice of the invasion was coming to light, he quite possibly hoped that his defence would convince Henry of his worth for promotion at court.

Henry II's patronage of literature likely served as another personal motive for Gerald to write approvingly of the King's realm. Not only did he seek promotion at court, but Gerald also for a long time sought admission to the see of Saint David's. He became archdeacon at Brecknock in 1175, after which he ran unsuccessfully as candidate for the bishopric of Saint David's on several occasions.[22] At this time, courtly patronage of literature often served two necessities for writers. For one, patronage provided a source of income, and, importantly, it was an aid towards securing a position in the church.[23] Gerald's social background, family ties and education also influenced his expectation that he should reach a high position within the church.[24] Thus, as well as writing in response to a commission by the King, Gerald likely wrote as much in the hope of attracting Henry's attention and reward.[25] His flattery of the King in this light is evident in his dedication of the *Topography* to Henry, and in exalting the glory of the English kingdom.[26]

The practice of dedicating literary works to kings was not unique to Gerald, however, nor to writers of his time. Similar examples are found in older literary chronicles, for example in the works of Bede. His *History of the English Church and People*, written in the eighth century, was dedicated: 'To the Most Glorious King Ceolwulf'.[27] Bede also referred to sources from which he obtained his ideas, namely Roman and local archives, oral traditions, and personal experiences.[28] Gerald may well have acquired his own inspiration from such sources. Another interesting parallel between the works of Bede and Gerald, several centuries later, was Bede's

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[21] Ibid., p. 139.

[22] Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, pp. 242-243.

[23] Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, p. 56.

[24] R.W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 51.

[25] Richard Mortimer, *Angevin England, 1154-1258* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 212.

[26] Michael Richter, 'Gerald of Wales: A Reassessment on the 750th Anniversary of His Death', *Traditio*, 29 (1973), 382.

[27] Bede, preface to *A History of the English Church and People*, p. 33.

[28] Joaquin Martinez Pizarro, 'Ethnic and National History ca. 500-1000', in *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 65.

negative portrayal of native Britons when discussing English history. The Anglo-Saxons were 'introduced as a providential nation sent by God to take Britain away from an unworthy and sinful people'.[29] This strikingly echoes Gerald's claims about Irish-folk, and the pressing need for Norman civilization of a sinful and inferior race.

These claims of Irish savagery, and comparative praises of the Norman realm, seem to have been based largely on Gerald's hopes for a promotion in Henry's court. It is thus questionable whether the views he expressed about Irish-folk were purely his own. Even supposing that these views *were* his own, however, Gerald would not have been alone in having such opinions. Twelfth-century popes similarly decried the Irish as ignorant, barbarous and untamed people who did things which put their souls at peril; they were thus in dire need of having the true Christian doctrine explained to them.[30]

Gerald seemed unique in the intensity of his claims, namely in discrediting any traces of Irish faith, and in his vivid descriptions of naked ruffians who sailed the seas. While contemporary writers were perhaps not as colourful in their prose, many did clearly share Gerald's general views. An example of a widespread belief in the moral and religious superiority of Normans, and relative ignorance of Irish-folk, is found in Stephen of Lexington's blunt question: 'How can you love the cloister and learning, if you know only Irish?'.[31] This comment itself displayed a remarkable ignorance of Irish monastic history and its vast contribution to both sacred and profane literature.[32] The remarks of these contemporaries give insight into a more general view towards difference throughout Norman society, one which was definitely not limited to Gerald's ideas. This view, reinforced in *Laudabiliter*, saw the Normans as having been placed in Ireland to bring civility and religion to a barbarous people. King Edward II (1307-1327), a century after Gerald's time, described the Irish as 'bestial and uneducated'.[33] The similarity of contemporary views to those of Gerald suggests that besides his political motives in impressing Henry and defending the invasion, his claims of Irish irreligion were also, to some degree, his own.

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[29] Ibid., p. 66.

[30] W.L. Warren, *Henry II* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), p. 188.

[31] Stephen of Lexington, quoted in F.X. Martin, 'John, Lord of Ireland, 1185-1216', in *A New History of Ireland Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534*, ed. by Art Cosgrove (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 155.

[32] Ibid., p. 155.

[33] James Lydon, 'A Land of War', in *A New History of Ireland Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534*, ed. by Art Cosgrove (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 242.

In conclusion, Gerald's writings about Irish irreligion, taken at face value, seem an example of exaggeration and self-contradiction. As such sources as the *Book of Kells* demonstrate, Christianity in Ireland was established many centuries before the Norman invasion. The most likely reasons for Gerald to write in this manner, then, seemed to be his political motivations. By convincing Henry that the Irish were hopeless barbarians who were in need of some stern Norman reform, he showed both his admiration and support of the Norman realm. This, he most likely did in the hope of gaining promotion at court. This political motive signifies a wider such trend, evident in the dedication of literary works to kings. The reflection of Gerald's views in contemporary works suggests a common attitude towards difference throughout wider Norman society. In examining the works of such writers as Gerald and his contemporaries, intellectual and cultural influences come to light. These influences affected how literature of the time was written. The question of 'why' Gerald wrote has now been considered. Cultural and academic influences on 'how' he wrote will be examined next.

Chapter II ~ Contemporary Inspirations

In this chapter, the wider intellectual context in which Gerald wrote will be discussed. Irish culture is examined as a case-study from the *Topography*. This includes what Gerald wrote of Irish diet, work, and leisure. These examples are considered with regard to Gerald's educational background and influences. His views are compared to those of his contemporaries, to determine how Irish culture was viewed in wider Norman society. Gerald's ideas and motives for writing are also examined within the context of the classical humanist revival, which helped shape the way in which he wrote of Irish culture.

The wider cultural context in which Gerald wrote will first be considered. His education during the humanist Renaissance was a factor of considerable influence on his writing. Gerald studied twice at the cathedral and abbey schools of Paris, first around 1165 and again around 1176, where he studied the arts, theology and law.[1] Taught by leading intellectual figures of the day, he later gave lectures there himself.[2] Paris was central to the revival of classical humanist literature and thought in the twelfth century. Besides new developments in philosophy and science, there was a marked revival of Latin learning and prose.[3] In Paris, the new centre of liberal arts, the Renaissance manifested itself in the study of writers and poets of antiquity. The writing of much new Latin grammar, rhetoric and prose was based on classical works.[4] To demonstrate the effect of new scholarship on twelfth-century writing, several themes from Gerald's *Topography* serve as good examples. The way in which he, and many of his contemporaries, wrote on such topics as geography, culture and art, clearly reflects the incorporation of these revived subjects into their own learning.

The earlier example of the two 'pagan' Irishmen at sea is again significant here, as it reveals much about Irish diet, dress, and custom as perceived by outsiders. The boatmen were naked

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[1] John W. Baldwin, 'Masters at Paris from 1179 to 1215: A Social Perspective', in *Renaissance and Renewal*, p. 143.

[2] Michelle Brown speaking as part of the programme 'Gerald of Wales' *In Our Time* (BBC Radio 4), http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01n1rbn

[3] Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, p. 7.

[4] Ibid., p. 99.

except for raw-hide belts worn round their waists. They had long flaxen hair and beards, and appeared ignorant of any lands besides their own, expressing great surprise at the Norman sailors' ship. They refused to eat bread and cheese offered by the sailors, saying they fed only on meat, fish and milk.[5] This account reflects the view of Ireland discussed in chapter one. Irish-folk were irreligious savages with no idea of civilizations beyond their own shores. The example also echoes wider medieval notions of geographically-isolated peoples as strange monsters, who inhabited the 'borderlands' and edges of the Earth.[6]

This theme was developing in academia of the time, in new studies of geography and 'different' people who lived beyond what was then considered the border of civilization. Little was yet known of lands beyond people's own shores. Smaller islands and societies nearby were hence regarded as the Earth's 'margins'. Isolated geographically, socially, spiritually, and thus, it was assumed, biologically, these margins formed a 'middle-space' between civilizations.[7] Middle-spaces were populated by all manner of beasts and hybrids not found anywhere else, and these hybrids were, by and large, monstrous.[8]

Gerald also wrote about Irish work and agriculture. The land was fertile and rich in soil, harvests and crops; there were flocks on the mountains and wild animals in the woods.[9] He saw plenty of potential for agricultural development. The opportunity seemed lost on the Irish, however. They were, according to Gerald, too lazy and primitive to work their land. Devoted only to leisure, their greatest pleasure was rest and the enjoyment of liberty. This made them 'a barbarous people, literally barbarous...All their habits are the habits of barbarians'.[10] Again Gerald's motives for writing are apparent, a topic explored in the first chapter. He stressed the need for Norman colonization, not only to educate the Irish in Christianity, but also to capitalize on the use of their land.

This notion is echoed by Gerald's contemporaries. The works of another twelfth-century writer, William of Malmesbury, suggest that Gerald was not alone in his belief in Irish savagery, and consequent need for intervention. 'What would Ireland be worth without the

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[5] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, pt. 3, p.111.
[6] Cohen, 'Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands', p. 96.

[7] Ibid., p. 96.

[8] Ibid., p. 89.

[9] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, pt. 1, p. 34.
[10] Ibid., pt. 3, p. 102.

goods that come in by sea from England?' wrote Malmesbury.[11] He described Ireland's people as unskilled, ragged and rustic mobs, who did not live in towns. The French and English he found comparatively far more civilized; they lived in towns and engaged in trade and commerce.[12] Malmesbury's emphasis on town-life and civility highlights an interesting link with his academic background. Part of the intellectual Renaissance was an embracing of civic culture, drawn from newly-rediscovered ancient texts.[13] Greco-Roman ideologies placed an inextricable link between civilized humanity and urban centres. Those who lived outside cities, lived outside the centres of law and civilization. Such people thus were considered not really human.[14] This idea is reflected clearly in Norman attitudes towards Irish culture. Irish society was largely rural, and based on pastoral livelihoods. The absence of large urban centres made Irish-folk all the more primitive and backwards to Norman eyes.

Amidst Gerald's lengthy descriptions of quite how barbarous and lazy Irishmen were, he interestingly noted one point in Irish culture, namely that of musical skill, of which he approved: 'It is only in the case of musical instruments that I find any commendable diligence in the people. They seem to me to be incomparably more skilled in these than any other people that I have seen'.[15] He described in considerable detail the technical method and style with which they played, suggesting that he spent time observing this first-hand. His observations on music also reflect the extent of Gerald's own education. It likely contained musical theory, one of the seven liberal arts central to the developing curriculum. While praising the musical talents of Irish-folk, Gerald also stated, however, that the Welsh and Scots would catch up quickly and could soon even out-distance the Irish in their own musical skills. Gerald's reluctance to give any solid praise to the Irish remained clear. Even where he gave credit, he simultaneously implied that others would soon outdo the Irish in these respects.[16]

The *Book of Kells*, mentioned earlier for its statement on Irish faith, provides equally vivid evidence of Irish art. Contrary to Gerald's view that the Irish had no artistic skills whatsoever,

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[11] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, trans. by R.A.B. Mynors, et al., 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 1, Book 5, pt. 409.1, p. 739.

[12] Ibid., 1, Book 5, pt. 409.1, p. 739; pt. 410.3, p. 741.

[13] Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, p. 63.

[14] Ibid., p. 63.

[15] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, pt. 3, p. 103.

[16] Ibid., pt. 3, p. 104.

the book demonstrated that Irish-folk in fact possessed highly developed artistic talents. These talents were evident in the incredible details of its pages. Besides its fascinating display of religious imagery and merging of numerous Celtic and Saxon art-styles, the *Book of Kells* also provides valuable evidence with regard to the development of Celtic society at the time of its making. The very existence of such books shows which resources were available, centuries before the presence of the Normans. A great range of ink colours, tones and shades were used in its illuminations, as well as fine vellum parchment and calligraphic tools.[17] This illustrates the level to which book-making and artistic production had developed in Ireland at this point.

The presence of pre-twelfth-century manuscripts likewise gives insight into the development of Irish scholarship in pre-Norman times. Manuscripts translated from Irish Gaelic displayed a high competence in Latin, as well as the work of professional medical men and religious writers.[18] This suggests that Ireland had well-developed forms of education, long before Norman presence. Evidence of this development was visible in the country's distinctive styles of literature, language, architecture, music and art, dating from its Celtic age. Gerald himself lived in a society and age where new forms of art, scholarship and thought were developing all the time. Yet he refused to acknowledge evidence of such trends in other places. He was surrounded by proof of Irish scholastic development and learning, yet he described the people as completely hopeless and uneducated. This suggests that his claims about Irish ignorance were based more on personal prejudice, than on any solidly-reasoned belief. It also reflects his personal motives regarding Norman propaganda, in spinning scandalous tales to make a case for invasion.

While differences in Irish culture were perhaps not as highly distinctive as suggested by Gerald, his reasons for implying that such differences existed are worth exploring. The idea of his wanting to impress Henry II is again relevant. Perhaps he wrote about the Irish in this manner not purely to convey his own views, but also to paint a picture of Irish people as being vastly different from Normans. This would make Henry's realm look comparatively much more sophisticated. Although of Welsh lineage himself, Gerald notably wrote little of

[17] Meehan, *The Book of Kells*, pp. 221-224.
[18] James Carney, 'Literature in Irish, 1169-1534', in *A New History of Ireland Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534*, ed. by Art Cosgrove (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 689.

Welsh cultural similarities with Ireland.[19] His claims about Ireland were all made with reference to the comparatively-civilized Normans. His identification with Norman culture over either Irish or Welsh, although only part Norman himself, also suggests a desire to please Henry II.

One point of particular interest regarding Gerald's use of both contemporary and classical ideas, is a remarkable similarity between Gerald's views on Ireland and those of the Greek geographer Strabo (64 BC - c. AD 24). This connection has not, to the best of my knowledge, been remarked upon previously. If established, however, it could be one of significance. Gerald is widely acknowledged by historians to have been 'the first foreigner' to describe Ireland.[20] Perhaps he was indeed the first outsider to actually travel in Ireland, and to write extensively about his findings. In existing scholarship, numerous connections have been made between ancient Latin works and individual literary aspects of Gerald's writings. None, however, appear to link Gerald's specific views on Ireland with any ancient source.

Greek texts were not yet readily available in twelfth-century England, and there is little evidence to suggest that Gerald could read Greek himself. A plausible connection to Strabo's work, however, lies with Robert Grosseteste. Gerald knew Grosseteste, who was also, like Strabo, a natural historian.[21] He was fluent in Greek, having studied and translated many Greek texts into Latin.[22] Grosseteste possibly had original works, or Latin translations, of Strabo at his disposal, and was quite possibly familiar with his ideas. Sharing Gerald's interests in both geography and works of antiquity, Grosseteste might well have shared these works with him.

One similarity between Gerald and Strabo's works was in their descriptions of Irish people. Strabo believed the Irish were more savage than Britons, man-eaters as well as heavy eaters, and that they freely practised incest.[23] Another similarity to Gerald's work was Strabo's description of Ireland's geographical isolation. Gerald maintained the 'borderlands' notion of

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[19] Mortimer, *Angevin England*, p. 138.
[20] Bragg, 'Gerald of Wales'.
[21] Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 65.

[22] Ibid., p. 47.

[23] Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. by H.L. Jones, 8 vols (London: Heinemann, 1917), 2, Book 4, pt. 5. c. 3-4, p. 259.

Ireland, linking physical isolation with cultural barbarity.[24] Strabo wrote likewise: 'Ierne, which lies to the North of Britain...is the home of men who are complete savages and lead a miserable existence because of the cold'.[25] Strabo made clear divisions between Hellenes and 'Barbarians', a theme central to his *Geography*. This revealed his own ideas of 'normal' culture, based on the norms of the Greek and Roman societies in which he lived.[26] Strabo's distinction of the civilized versus the savage, as it were, was mirrored centuries later in the works of Gerald and his stance towards Irish cultural 'difference'. Strabo also stressed that the regions beyond Ireland were completely uninhabitable; hence, the northern limit of the inhabited world was placed there.[27] Gerald likewise placed Ireland as the limit of western land, beyond which there was habitation of neither men nor beasts.[28]

The possible link between Strabo and Gerald's writing, and Gerald's established links with classical scholarship, also cast doubt on claims made by earlier historians. Maurice Powicke wrote about Gerald's work, and wrote separately of the classical revival. He went on to argue that: 'Gerald was for the most part oblivious to this renaissance'.[29] Powicke added that Gerald had no systematic knowledge of new learning, and that he was apparently unaware of new developments in mathematical science.[30] These claims, in light of the evidence presented in this paper, are quite frankly wrong.

Powicke's arguments are refutable for several reasons. Gerald studied at Paris during the height of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance. Here he must have studied the seven liberal arts, which included mathematics, arithmetic and geometry.[31] His echoes of Strabo suggest familiarity with geographical and natural history. Gerald must thus have had *some* exposure to the new forms of scholarship which were emerging in these subjects, through the discovery of classical texts. Examples given so far demonstrate the extent of his learning. They also show Gerald's knowledge and use of classical texts. Moreover, influence from the revival

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[24] Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, p. 53.

[25] Strabo, *Geography*, 1, Book 2, pt. 5.8, p. 443.

[26] Daniela Dueck, *Strabo of Amasia: A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 75-77.

[27] Ibid., 1, Book 2, pt. 1, c. 13-14, p. 271; pt. 5.8, p. 443.

[28] Gerald of Wales, preface to *The History and Topography of Ireland*, pt. 1, p. 31.

[29] Maurice Powicke, *The Christian Life in the Middle Ages and Other Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1935), p. 122.

[30] Ibid., p. 122.

[31] Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, p. 25.

was evident not only in his use of classical narrative and rhetoric, but also in his ideas on geography, music and natural sciences. Powicke's suggestion that Gerald knew absolutely nothing of these new developments is thus highly unconvincing. Gerald and his works did not exist in a vacuum. Any suggestion that Gerald was supposedly untouched by the scientific or intellectual changes which occurred in twelfth-century academia, of which he was such a prominent part, is flawed.

In conclusion, differences were perhaps evident amongst native Irish and Norman cultures in overall living habits. Gerald's main reason for writing, however, seemed tied to pleasing the king. Besides voicing his own views, he appeared to write in hope of gaining courtly rewards. Influence from Gerald's educational background is also clear, in his detailed observations on Irish geography, music, and art. His echo of Strabo's view of Ireland suggests, possibly, an even broader knowledge of classical sources, both Latin and Greek, than has been assumed previously. These themes were all employed in his work to portray the Irish as completely barbarous and incompetent, or to suggest that where they possessed any talents, other races would soon outdo them. These vivid comparisons likely served a purpose, illustrating to Henry that his own people were, relatively, much more sophisticated than their subjects.

Chapter III ~ Classical Inspirations

The last chapter examined contemporary influences on Gerald's writing. This chapter will focus more on the classical. It deals with Gerald's personal interests in following wider twelfth-century literary trends, classical influences on his own literary content and style, and how this style was shaped to suit his audience. One theme from the *Topography* which illustrates each of these points very nicely is that of Irish nature. Irish humanity and wildlife, according to Gerald, was full of miracles, oddities and charms. While he wrote approvingly of the island's physical landscape, he was considerably less-impressed by the nature of its people. A recurring theme was his comparison of Irish people with beasts, between whom, given their supposed penchant for bestiality, there was no large gap. In describing bestial themes, Gerald drew frequently upon classical anecdotes to illustrate his points. These anecdotes reveal more about the purpose for which he wrote, and reflects his educational influences from the classical revival.[1]

Throughout the *Topography,* Gerald gave numerous examples of beast-like Irish-folk, witnessed in his travels. A woman in Limerick had a beard down to her waist, and a mane on her back.[2] A peculiar man in Wicklow was half-ox: 'He had all the parts of the human body except the extremities which were those of an ox...He could not speak at all; he could only low.'[3] This snippet gives some suggestion about Gerald's own views, and superstitions, perhaps, concerning Irish-folk. Namely, such mutant creatures existed because of Irish tendencies towards bestiality. Just before the Normans came to the island, Gerald wrote, a cow gave birth to a man-calf, after intercourse with a man.[4] The said ox-man likely had some disability to which he owed his unfortunately bovine appearance. The rare condition described by Gerald was likely a congenital deformity, now known as ectodermal dysplasia.[5] Gerald's conviction that ox-man was the product of a cow's intercourse with a man, 'a

[1] Leyser, 'Gerald of Wales'.
[2] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland,* pt. 2, pp. 72-73.
[3] Ibid., pt. 2, pp. 73-74.
[4] Ibid., pt. 2, p. 74.

[5] Cain, 'Unnatural History', 37.

particular vice of that people',[6] suggests not only his own prejudice against the Irish, but a more general means for his people to explain their world. It signifies a wider medieval perception of 'difference', in which Gerald was by no means alone. The aforementioned belief in 'borderlands' and the sub-human creatures with which such lands were inhabited, is echoed here.

The ox-man tale was certainly no invention of Gerald's, nor of his society, however. The influence of his academic background and his use of classical texts is clear, namely Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*.[7] Gerald's references to this text, and his quotations taken from it elsewhere in the *Topography*, show the extent of his education and familiarity with such newly-rediscovered works.[8] Ovid's tale of the Cretan Minotaur, the offspring of Pasiphae and a bull with whom she had fallen in love, strikingly reflects Gerald's musings on the biological deviations of the Irish. His descriptions of a man who was half-ox, and an ox who was half-man,[9] mirror Ovid's tale of the 'bull-man, man-bull, conceived through a queen's guilt'.[10] The nature of Pasiphae's affection was likewise echoed in Gerald's work, especially in his account of a woman who fell in love with a goat:

> This goat had intercourse with a certain woman...The wretched woman, proving herself more a beast in accepting him than he did in acting, even submitted herself to his abuse. How unworthy and unspeakable! How reason succumbs so outrageously to sensuality!...the matter was detestable on both sides.[11]

This example reflects the purpose for which Gerald wrote, advising Henry II on the need for colonization of primitive Irish-folk. The strange deformities and quirks witnessed by Gerald served as fitting proof of the need for outside intervention. Irish people, as far as Gerald was concerned, were quite clearly incapable of controlling themselves wherever animal-human affairs were concerned.[12]

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[6] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, pt. 2, p. 74.
[7] Cain, 'Unnatural History', 43, fn. 23.

[8] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, pt. 3, p. 104.
[9] Ibid., pt. 2, p. 74.

[10] Ovid, 'The Art of Love', in *The Erotic Poems*, trans. by Peter Green (London: Penguin, 1982), Book 2, 24, p. 191.

[11] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, pt. 2, p. 75.
[12] Cain, 'Unnatural History', 36.

Gerald's notion of people acquiring strange deformities as punishment for sin was, however, not limited purely to Irish-folk. A similar concept is found in Gerald's writings on Wales. A Welsh knight, supposedly, once gave birth to a calf: 'A certain knight...after a long and unremitting anguish, which lasted three years...at length gave birth to a calf...It was probably a punishment exacted for some unnatural act of vice'.[13] The casually suggested plausibility of such occurrences was, perhaps, a product of Gerald's highly imaginative mind. It also, however, illustrates a wider medieval belief: strange and novel events were obvious punishments or warnings from God.

Gerald's more subtle claims of Irish animalism were likely intended to show the need for taming and intervention by the comparatively civilized Normans. His myths and magical tales, meanwhile, could hardly have been intended to be read literally. It thus pays to consider the reception Gerald hoped for in his wider audience. Here Kempshall's work is of particular relevance. He considers the purpose for which medieval texts were shaped, as well as the audience for whom they were written.[14]

Gerald's manner and style of writing was likely intended to captivate and engage his readers. The above animal-human anecdotes, while anatomically somewhat dubious, do illustrate Gerald's use of classical narratives in order to moralise, instruct and entertain. As Bede did before him, Gerald likely shaped a great deal of his works according to the demands of his audience. He likely also adapted his narratives to reflect popular customs or views.[15] The expectations of his audience would have conditioned what, and how, he chose to write.[16]

Much of Gerald's writing suggests a desire to provide his readers with a humorous satire or parody of Irish-folk. He wrote in a society which for centuries, from the time of Strabo, even, had held traditionally negative views of Irish-folk. They were considered primitive, marginal beings, of whom most people in fact knew little. Gerald could therefore play upon this common belief and write whatever he, and his audience, might like to believe about the Irish. He thereby show-cased his own sophisticated literary style, in weaving fantastic allegories and tales. This seems a more likely explanation for his writing of the entire *Topography* than

[13] Gerald of Wales, *The Journey Through Wales and The Description of Wales,* trans. by Lewis Thorpe (Middlesex: Penguin, 1978), Book 1, ch. 2, p. 88.
[14] Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History*, pp. 310-311.
[15] Ibid., p. 310.
[16] Ibid., pp. 310-312.

a mere wish to present 'fact'. Likewise, perhaps, he aimed to 'humour' the King into giving him a job promotion, besides making a case for the invasion of Ireland.

Aside from painting the Irish in a bad light to provide cause for Norman intervention, much of Gerald's writing, as has been demonstrated, was pure myth. It is questionable whether Henry was duly impressed. He and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, were known to share an interest in Arthurian legends and tales.[17] Gerald himself made mention of King Arthur on several occasions, claiming to have been shown Arthur's grave.[18] This perhaps was also intended to please his King.

Henry would have been confronted by a very different brand of fantasy, however, in Gerald's tales of the strange and abominable creatures he supposedly encountered in Ireland. Moreover, Henry was not incapable of distinguishing fiction from fact.[19] Having spent almost a year in Ireland himself, he would, as Rollo writes: 'have had ample opportunity to know that it was not populated by talking wolves, bearded ladies, women in love with goats, and kings copulating with mares…Henry's personal experience would eloquently convince him that Gerald's spectacular revelations were fantasy'.[20] A clue as to how Gerald's works were in fact received by the King, lies in his lack of promotion once his literary efforts were complete. Henry quite possibly mistook Gerald's fantastic hyperbole, presented to him as fact, rather as an insult to his intelligence than as royal praise.

By comparing the works of Gerald to those of his contemporaries, more light is shed on whether Gerald was in fact moving away from traditional literary trends in his content and style, or whether he was simply following a long-established pattern. One very significant point, relevant both to expression of content and reasons for writing, was the major role of rhetoric and narrative in literature at the time. An essential part of writing was to mix traditional style with experience in composing narrative. Chroniclers wrote for sophisticated audiences, educated in debate and ancient rhetoric, who appreciated the subtleties of oratory.[21] This classical tradition of rhetoric clearly influenced Gerald's predecessors, namely

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[17] Martin Aurell, 'Henry II and Arthurian Legend', in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, pp. 362, 370.
[18] Gerald of Wales, *The Description of Wales*, pp. 280-281.
[19] Rollo, *Glamourous Sorcery*, p. 132.

[20] Ibid., p. 132.
[21] Marjorie Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), p. 196.

Bede, and Gerald's contemporaries such as Orderic Vitalis. Cicero, a great inspiration for many scholars of Gerald's time, praised history as 'the light of truth' and the guide of life; yet he insisted that it also needed the creator's art.[22] This is certainly significant in evaluating the intentions of twelfth-century authors.

Earlier medieval chroniclers such as Bede were influenced by the ancients. After Bede came a raft of contemporary literature besides Gerald's, in which authors borrowed freely from the greats of antiquity. This suggests that the twelfth-century revival of humanism and classical thought not so much established, as built upon, an existing literary pattern both in content and style. Continuity is evident both in the development of narrative, and in the above animal anecdotes displayed in Gerald's work. Part of the classical revival was a renewed questioning of God, the workings of nature, and man's place within it.[23] Wonder stories which pondered the relationship between animals and humans were thus not unique to Gerald, nor to Ireland. Nor were such tales uniquely Norman. These anecdotes show a much wider, age-old trend of attempts to explain and make sense of the natural world. The revival of this ancient trend reflected the changing intellectual nature of Gerald's time.[24]

William of Malmesbury, in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, wrote of his desire to fulfil a somewhat 'grander narrative, beyond listing only dates and names of kings.[25] His dislike of common, contemporary style was clear in his views of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Although he acknowledged the *Chronicle'*s material contribution to his history of England, he despised its style as a very 'primitive and lowly form of literature'.[26] He referred to both the works of Bede and classical writers, namely Virgil and Cicero, as potential guides for his own literary style. In this he aimed for a more sophisticated account, inspired by the 'flower of rhetoric'.[27] Gerald wrote similarly of his wish to 'adorn with all the flowers of my rhetoric those rugged countries, Ireland, Wales and Britain'.[28]

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[22] Ibid., p. 196.

[23] Leyser, 'Gerald of Wales'.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History*, p. 88.

[26] Rodney M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), pp. 15-16.

[27] Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History*, p. 88.

[28] Gerald of Wales, first preface to *The Description of Wales*, p. 212.

Writers aimed to provide not so much a factual 'truth', as an entertaining, sophisticated and informative read for their audience, a theme to which Gerald adhered. William's description echoes what Gerald seemed to aim for in the examples given above. Although Gerald was not a historian, he was, as professional writer, a true product of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance.[29] Using historical material mainly to provide ammunition for his arguments, he treated evidence creatively, mixing both oral and written sources to produce his narratives.[30] This signified a new literary trend, one which was echoed by Gerald's contemporaries. This trend concerned the creation of literary masterpieces, complete with tales, techniques and anecdotes drawn from the classics, rather than a mere copying of sources as was often done by their medieval predecessors.[31]

The borrowing of classical works and styles was also evident in earlier twelfth-century sources. The work of William of Poitiers serves as a good example. He quoted the Roman poets Virgil and Statius as templates for his style. In describing the great feats of William the Conqueror during the Norman Conquest, William of Poitiers suggested that these authors would more poetically, dramatically, and truthfully, have done the topic justice.[32] The inspiration William of Poitiers took from these authors was prevalent throughout his writing. It showed his knowledge of classical style, and his desire to produce a great work of literature.[33] He did not limit himself to one particular style, but borrowed from various writers depending on his theme. On military victories, triumphs, or religious virtues, he employed different styles, using whichever seemed most suitable for the topic. He thus borrowed from Cicero, Caesar, Sallust, Virgil, and Statius.[34] Literary style was clearly just as significant to him as the mere relaying of 'events' to his readers, often even 'interrupting his narrative for a passage of pure rhetoric'.[35]

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[29] Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 221.

[30] Ibid., p. 221.

[31] Ibid., pp. 221-222.

[32] William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ed. by R.H.C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), pt. 2, p. 137.

[33] R.H.C. Davis, 'William of Poitiers and his History of William the Conqueror', in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. by R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), p. 71.

[34] Ibid., p. 72.

[35] Ibid., p. 72.

The classical influence on William of Poitiers' style seems strikingly similar to Gerald's, and his allusions to Irish nature and its miracles and wonders. The rhetorical technique of William of Poitiers was especially reflected by Gerald, who also, between describing the monstrosities and quirks of Irishmen, frequently digressed into long tangential spiels on divine virtue and evil. These passages seem intended not so much to make specific points on his subject matter, as to show-case his literary style. A clear similarity between William of Poitiers' writing and that of Gerald, was William's decision to justify his ruler's actions and policies regarding the conquest of England, through flattery and praise.[36] Gerald wrote likewise of Henry II's victories, triumphs, and valour. He compared Henry's feats particularly to the *Heroides* of Ovid, and *On Clemency* by Seneca, in their descriptions of the courage and virtue of kings.[37]

In conclusion, Gerald's narrative raises many interesting points as to his motives for writing. It also exemplifies his influences from the literary greats of antiquity. In assessing his works alongside those of his contemporaries, as well as the earlier works of Bede, there appears a reoccurring trend of allusions to classical writers. The main theme which thus emerges is that literary style, as well as relaying straight 'facts', was equally, if at times not more, significant in shaping contemporary prose. Gerald perhaps offered an outstanding example of narrative, in his particularly fiery ideas and accusations where Irish-folk and their allegedly-barbarous lives were concerned. Nevertheless, his use of classical texts, styles and animal allegories were not entirely unique to him, nor to his time or people. Rather, he appears to represent an existing trend of borrowing works and ideas of classical scholars to suit his own themes, thus emphasizing not only a desire to relay 'truth', but a more significant, widespread wish of his time for sophisticated literary style, narrative and flourish.

[36] R. Allen Brown, introduction to 'William of Poitiers', in *The Norman Conquest: Sources and Documents*, by R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), p. 17.
[37] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, pt. 3, pp. 124-125.

Conclusion

An exploration of the three related themes of political, intellectual and literary motives in twelfth-century writing shows clearly the views and inspirations of Gerald. These motives also illustrate a much wider trend in similar writing of his time. The ideas expressed by Gerald, and demonstrated in his discussion of Irish irreligion, culture, and nature, were perhaps exaggerated, and at times purely mythological. Even so, a significant thread is found throughout.

Religious examples have shown why Gerald wrote. His claims of Irish irreligion illustrated his support and defence of the Norman court. This, he likely gave in hope of promotion. Similar views held by Gerald's contemporaries, suggest that his ideas were also part of a wider societal belief about 'difference'. In the second chapter, Gerald's manner of writing has been demonstrated. Contemporary influences from his peers and educational background are evident in his observations on Irish music, geography, and art. His discrediting of these, again makes his political motives clear. The third chapter, in its discussion of classical influences, has shown the rising importance of literary technique and style. Gerald's animal anecdotes exemplified his use of classical texts, both in content and style. The shaping of skilful literary narrative became just as, if not more, significant than a mere recital of 'truth'.

Finally, it has been the aim of this dissertation to examine Gerald's works from different angles, within a wider political, intellectual and literary environment. There remain numerous channels, though, for further study and debate. One such area concerns the question of Strabo. Further research might establish a clearer link between Strabo, other ancients, and twelfth-century authors. A potential link to Strabo does not appear to have been considered previously. This connection would be significant, as it could reveal more about the extent of revived scholarship at the time. Alongside known connections of Gerald's work to classical texts, it would also serve to refute the claims of such historians as Powicke. This dissertation has contradicted the remarks of Powicke, regarding Gerald's ignorance of the classical revival. It has illustrated that Gerald *was* influenced by numerous strands of twelfth-century scholarship, both in sciences and arts, during the Renaissance. This dissertation has also placed Gerald and his works within a broader context of twelfth-century poltical, intellectual, and literary trends, than has been done previously. It offers a new approach to existing historiography, concerning both Gerald and the wider twelfth century. This study has also

built upon recent historiographical trends. Namely, it considers not only the material of medieval literary works, but also the purpose and audience for which they were written. This new approach makes apparent each of Gerald's literary aims. He wrote to please Henry; he wrote in his defence; he wrote to alert civilization to the savages who dwelt at its margins. But most of all, perhaps, he wrote to tell a great tale. Gerald's adherence to the notion that writing should be equal parts truth and beauty, a functional work of art, as such, shows an undoubted influence from classical antiquity. Gerald's closing lines in the *Topography*, taken from the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, perhaps give modern readers most insight into his intentions. They summarize his aims nicely: 'He has won every point who has joined the useful to the sweet'.[1]

[1] Horace, *Art of Poetry*, 343, quoted in Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland,* pt. 3, p. 125, fn. 83.

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